[J. Henry Brown]

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J. HENRY BROWN

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AUTOBIOGRAPHY

1

I was born at Wilmington, Will County, Illinois, Aug. 4th, 1831. My father had moved to that State in an early day, and became acquainted with my mother, Miss Lucinda Cox, whose father Thomas Cox had been a resident for several years, and who was in fact a pioneer in the portion of Illinois in which he resided. Father married in 1836, and soon became interested in a woolen mill and a flouring mill that my grandfather had erected at Wilmington , a town which he had laid out, and which is now a thriving little city.

My grandfathers on both sides passed through the various vicissitudes that befall all early settlers in a new country - and in fact, I sprang from a pioneer stock - both of my great-grandfathers being pioneers and participants in the war of 1812 and the Indian wars of the new country in which they had settled.

The continued reports that were promulgated through the publications of the day in regard to the then mysterious country—Oregon; their natural disposition to remove to new countries to better their condition; continual sickness in their family caused by the undrained swamps which abounded in that portion of Illinois, determined my grandfather and parents to emigrate to Oregon. They were unable to dispose of their property for two years, but finally a gentleman from New York State in the fall of 1846, purchased the property at a great sacrifice.

Preparations were immediately begun for the long dangerous trip. 1/2 2 In the transfer of property my grandfather could not dispose of a store that he owned, consequently he determined to purchase wagons and take it with him, thereby completely circumventing a combination against him of compelling a disposal of the goods for a nominal price. Teams of four yoke of oxen each, wagons, necessary fire arms with ample supply of ammunition and the innumerable articles actually necessary for the trip was purchased and the day for departure set.

The “Oregon fever” as it was termed, raged fearfully, and the applicants as drivers for our teams were numerous, so there was no difficulty in making choice with the understanding that they were to drive teams, stand guard, and assist in camp duties, for their board and transportation of their clothing and tools, as most of them were tradesmen of different kinds. It was found necessary to ship a portion to our rendezvous at St. Joseph, Missouri, as we were compelled to haul feed for our teams a greater portion of the way, the winter having just broken up and the roads being almost impassible.

I remember only a portion of the young men that started with us, but will remark that the following came through to Salem, Oregon, where our journey ended; Walter and Thomas Montieth (brothers) Samuel Althouse, Wm. Bosey, and Mr. Van Vource. Some others who started, gave up the trip on arriving at St. Joseph as there were rumors rife at that place concerning the Pawnee Indians, well calculated to discourage the attempts to cross the plains. 1/3

Our train consisted of thirteen wagons, and on the morning of March 15, 1847, the teams were hitched and everything being in readiness, leave takings were exchanged in the streets of Wilmington. Although I 3 was quite young the scene was indelably fixed upon my mind. Tears were shed by mother and daughters as they embraced each other for the last time on earth, and the parting kiss was given as the last token of love from the hearts that knew the parting was forever. It was as solemn as a funeral, only the actors were in health, the withdrawal from sight was as irretrivable as the clods upon the coffin,

one portion remained to develop a prosperous State, while these who left, went to found a glorious State in our Union on the faraway Pacific “and plant the stars of glory there”, the sun-down of one continent; to fulfil a destiny, the same as the Pilgrims who landed on Plimoth rock. But the final hour had come, the word was given and the train started on its long, weary six months of travel and toil. After traveling a few miles we camped, but the start had been made, and nearly all for the first time in their lives experienced the novelty of camping.

There was nothing of great interest happened until we arrived at Skunk river in Iowa, a district of country sparsely settled, but abundantly supplied with wild honey and turkeys. A family consisting of man, wife and three grown daughter, had lived there for several years, and subsisted mostly on game and what little corn and vegetables that were required for their modest wants. The old gentleman come to our camp and noticed a cooking stove that had been taken out of one of the wagons to prepare the evening meal. He went to his cabin immediately and brought his family, who with great interest made a minute examination of the “new cooking contrivance.” 1/4 4 My grandmother taking great pains to show them the construction of the stove and explain to them how it cooked and baked. When we sat down to our supper, they were invited to partake, which they accepted. We had biscuits made of wheat flour, which was to them a great treat, and their admiration knew no bounds.

We continued our journey without any further incidents and arrived in due time at St. Joseph, where we remained for several days arranging our loads for the final start. Our company augmented by Joseph Cox, son of Thomas Cox and Peter Palley, a son-in-law of Thomas Cox, and Louis Pettyjohn, and about the 1st of May made a final start. Having only a short time since come into possession of a journal kept by one of the company, I will draw upon it for incidents along the trip. 1/5

Camp Organization

Immediately upon crossing the Missouri river, we was outside of the settlements, and no more houses could be seen at that early day, except at the different trading posts or forts of the four companies. A short distance from the river we found camp and during the evening an election was held. Thomas Cox who was the eldest man, and who owned most of the wagons in the train, was chosen Captain. A few minutes after this necessary preliminary had been arranged, a stranger rode into camp and stated that he wished to go to Oregon, and would like to accompany us, if suitable arrangements could be made. As one of our teamsters had that evening decided not to make the trip, the stranger was accepted. He gave his name as Bradshaw and stated that he had been upon the plains considerably and had followed trapping. I shall have occasion to speak of him again. Our wagons 5 had been only parked or drove into lines, and the next day he showed us how to corrall our wagons as follows: After the place had been selected for the camp, the leading teams stopped at the place designated, and the next immediately to the rear and quartering, with the forward wheels nearly even with the hind wheels of the first wagon, and the third wagon assuming the same position to the second and so on through the train; forming a circle when the train had all assumed their positions. The teams would not all be inside of the corral. After they had been unyoked and driven out, the tongues were chained to preceding wagons, then making a barricade of great strength in which to keep the stock during the night and to resist an attack by Indians. The camp fires were built inside where the cooking was done and tents stretched. 1/6

A bivouac of a large train (for other wagons had joined us, and now numbered 40 wagons), is a very picturesque sight, the white covers of the wagons and new tents resembled a small village, while the camp-fires shed their ruddy light on the surrounding darkness with its ever changing hues and making the increasing darkness still more impenetrable. The female portion were busy clearing away the remains of the evening meal of preparing for the early morning breakfast. The men, except those who were on guard duty would form circles around the fires, smoking and recounting the incidents of the days travel, singing songs, telling jokes at each others expense; while in another part of

the camp, the violin would enliven the air with its notes, to which young and agile feet were keeping time in the merry dance on the soil of the plains, 6 while the boys were marching around playing soldier, led by a youthful drummer, who pounded with might and main on a small specimen of that warlike cymbol. Gradually the stock would lie down and the people retire to dream of home and the dear ones left behind; the camp would become quiet and the fires grow dimmer until its flickering flames expired; no sound would be heard except the low talk of the guards as they made their rounds or the lonesome howl of the prairie wolf as they prowled around the camp. The position seemed to us strange and the novelty had not yet been expended.

At an early hour, the camp would be arroused, preparatory for the days journey. Immediately after breakfast, the cattle would be driven into camp, then followed a scene of confusion, men and boys running hither and yon, looking for their oxen, a great many of them not yet broken sufficiently to be readily yoked, which added greatly to the uproar; the women hastily packing away cooking utensils, or frantically calling out to some child that was disposed to get within dangerous proximity to animals heels; all was hurry and bustle, but finally the teams would be yoked and hitched to their respective wagons and the word would be given for some family team to take the lead for the day, which would of course take its place in the rear the next. The train would soon be on the move stringing along the road with the loose cattle in the rear. Mr. Bradshaw soon assumed the general supervision of the movement of the train; while my grandfather enforced his orders and choose the camp. 1/8

There was no particular incident transpired until we arrived at the Big Blue river, where the first fatal accident happened in a train as 7 we came up to the banks of that stream. A boy about 8 years old was standing on the wagon tongue driving, when he lost his balance and fell beneath the wheel, which crushed his head, causing instant death. The burial took place that night, and I can recollect the strange sight, as the people stood around with light as they consigned him to rest with a boot box for a coffin.

In a few days we reached the Platte, and entered the edge of the buffalo country. The first night we camped upon this stream, we were visited by one of those thunder storms for which that part of the country is famous. The day had been very warm, and in the evening about sundown, Mr. Bradshaw discovered a small black cloud in the west, and immediately ordered 20 men to saddle horses and remain on them while the rest were securely tied to the wagons, tents extra pined, the cattle herded closely by horse and footmen. The storm could now plainly be seen coming by the flashes of lightening and the rapidly increasing roar of the thunder. It was well that these precautions had been taken, although not wholly successful. When the storm struck us, it was quite dark, which of course added to the confusion. It seemed as if the very elements were at war with each other. The blinding brightness of lightning as it apparently covered acres, followed instantaneously by the deafning crash that seemed to shake the earth, accompanied by large hailstones and a terrific wind, when all combined was well calculated to throw everything into confusion. Tents were prostrated, thus increasing the fright of the occupants; cattle bellowing as they rushed by with the storm; horses struggling franticly to break their fastenings to the wagons, mingled with the shouting of men, made an hours experience that can never be forgotten when once endured. 1/9 8 But the storm went by as rapidly as it came, leaving a heavy coating of hail in its track, with all the cattle gone and the horsemen in pursuit. As the clouds cleared away and the moon and stars came out, they were enabled to follow and gradually herd them together, and by 10 o'clock next morning we were again on the move. /10

We traveled several days up the Platte. The last morning before we crossed the river, we were detained over two hours to allow a tremendous herd of buffaloes to pass across the road about a quarter of a mile ahead of us. There was at least 500,000 head of these animals, and the thundering noise they made as they galloped along could be distinctly heard at our camp. The reason that Bradshaw did not allow us to proceed was that there was often great danger of losing our live stock. When the herd passed, we went ahead and arrived at the ford of the Platte and immediately proceeded to cross. We were

compelled to keep the teams constantly moving as it had a quick sand bottom, and the water so muddy that it was impossible for us to see into it an inch. As my fathers team had gone about half way cross the stream, the leaders turned back and came near turning over the wagon containing the family. My father was compelled to jump out into the stream, waist deep and very cold and made across along side of the team. He caught cold, and that night had a chill, which was followed with an attack of the mountain fever from which he never fully recovered.

A few days afterwards we went through a praire's dog town of at least two miles in length. I copy the following description by a Naturalist in the Scientific American: “The Prairie dog (Cynomys ludovicianus) /11 9 of the Missouri region and westward and southwestward, belong to a genius of American rodents intermediate between the marmont and prairie squirrels. The animal is about 13 inches long, with a tail 4 inches nine; the color above is redish or cinnamon brown, with light to the hairs, and a few black ones intermixed; beneath, brownish white. The cheek pouches are rudamentary, eyes large, ears quite short. They live in burrows in great numbers, accompanied by rattlesnakes and ground owls.”

The dog generally stands near their holes on their hind feet and emit a sound something like a small puppy barking; but when approached, they dart with wonderful agility into their holes uttering a defiant bark.

Our company succeeded in killing several buffalos as we traveled through their range, but none was allowed to go to waste as it was “jerked” i.e. dried on sticks over a fire and carried along, making excellent food.

The night that we camped on Black Haw Creek there was a company (known as the “Blue Wagon Train” for the reason that their wagons covers were made of blue colored material), camped about 8 miles above us and ahead of us, had a stampede with disastrous results. The company had corralled their stock and the guards were preparing to take their

stations, when one of them commenced exploding caps on an Allen revolver preparatory to loading, when one of the oxen standing near, gave a jump and bellowed, when the whole herd became panic stricken, making a general rush for the opposite side of the circle of wagons or corrall, entirely going over the same, and it was said, that some of the animals actually went over the wagons, crushing everything beneath them. All the stock, horses, cattle and sheep became alike stampeded. //12 10 One child was killed and several other persons more or less injured; wagons broken considerably; while about a dozen sheep were killed outright, and other larger animals crippled. The stampeded herd happened to take the road that led towards our camp, and the first indications that we had was some of them appearing among us and apparently as wild as any buffalo that lived upon the surrounding plains. Mr. Bradshaw immediately took in the situation and ordered out all the men to guard and quiet our stock which began to grow very uneasy, but we quelled the excitement. In due time some men came from the other train in pursuit, and gave an exciting account of their misfortune and asked assistance, which was readily granted. They succeeded in recovering quite a number before moving. The next day we passed their camp and saw the effect of the stampede. We learned afterwards that the company did not succeed in recovering all of their stock, as most probably they became mixed in some herd of buffaloes. /13

About a week after this, another train stampeded as we were informed, as the train was about to start after a short hault at noon. Our informant stated that a boy was in the act of mounting a horse, when the saddle turned, throwing the boy and causing the animal to run away, and attempted to pass between the wagon and the wheel yoke, and frightened the team, which started on the run, bellowing as they went. This started the other teams, and in an incredible short time the whole train was dashing over the plains in spite of all the efforts of the drivers, who of course were left behind. The women and children jumped or were thrown out, and some of them severely injured. The frightened oxen did considerable damage to the wagons, and delayed the train for several days. It is astonishing with what

speed a team of four yoke of oxen can run. Some men assert 11 that they ran as fast as a team of eight horses could have done, and carried as much destruction.

The next / object of interest that we saw on this long and tedious road, was what is known as the Chimney Rock, which we had seen for two or three days before we reached it. This is a sharp pointed rock somewhat resembling an enormous chimney, as it stands alone in the plains and can be seen for 30 or 40 miles.

The next place of interest is Scotts' Bluff, a good history of which is given in Palmer's guide.

We arrived at Fort Laramie about June 15th 1847, and remained one day, where we witnessed the first War Dance. There were about 5,000 Sioux Indians who were forming an expedition against their hereditary enemy the Pawnee nation. The evening of July 3rd we arrived at Independence Rock. This is a solitary granate rock rising out of the level plains about 80 feet high, and about 600 yards long, and half as wide. The rock has hundreds of names upon it, some cut in its hard surface, but mostly of paint or tar. As we camped there and celebrated the 4th of July 1846, our company also added their names, with date &c. We have read the names that had been placed there for years before ours.

The morning of the 5th we started on and passed through the “Devils Gate” a narrow gap in the mountains, through which runs the Sweet Water. This gap is very narrow and the walls fully 500 feet high, with only room for the wagon between the rock and the water. A little boy had died and was buried only the day before in this narrow road for the /15 12 purpose of concealment from the Indians as they dug up all fresh graves for the clothing. By adopting this mode, the passing teams obliterated all traces, and the dead were allowed to rest in peace.

July 11th we reached the summit of the Rocky Mountains and passed over it in a gentle ridge, where the water flowed on one side to the Atlantic and on the other to the Pacific,

the point we so desired to reach. Thus within a few hundred yards, the waters parted, each to seek its great reservoir on either side of the continent.

We next came to Bear river, and traveled some two or three days along its general course. On July 24th my father died, he had about recovered the attack of fever caused by getting wet in the Platte, but caught cold and suffered a relapse without any hope of recovery. There was no physician in our or any available train. We were compelled to travel, and having no spring wagon along, the roughness of the road, with the heat of the weather greatly ? aggregated the disease, and its progress was rapid. He died about midnight and was buried at sunrise in the morning, the grave being eight feet deep, for a coffin, same boards of boxes were arranged around as well as could be, and the grave filled up. Our train of forty wagons passed over it, as did hundreds of others afterwards who did not know who slept beneath; but his was not the only grave, there were hundreds of others the same, and when a depression was observed, they were refilled, and on they passed, not knowing but the same would be their fate before the journey was ended. ? /16

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The next place of note that we found was the Soda Springs on Bear river. We remained at this place half a day. The springs are very numerous, but having been described so often, it is not necessary to repeat it here.

There had nothing transpired of interest, except that our teams were beginning to get poor and suffered a great deal from sore feet, and it was found necessary to lighten up our wagons, a process that was continued for the rest of the journey by the entire emigration, and many useless articles that had been hauled for a 1,000 miles were thrown out and left by the side of the road, as an instance, some one in advance of us, had hauled an entire weaving loom, —timber and all, as if there was no timber in Oregon. Our real suffering as an emigration commenced when we arrived in the Snake river country; barren, rocky, and great scarcity of water. In due time we arrived at Fort Hall, then owned by the Hudson's

Bay Company, but built by Nath. J. Wyeth, an American. Capt. Grant was in command, and had lived at that lonesome and desolate place for several years before.

We left here and traveled down Snake river and encountered great difficulty at times in obtaining water. The river runs in a tremendously deep canyon, and when in the country above it looked like a ribbon in its great depth below, and it is a very toilsome job to descend and ascend, and when we descended to the first crossing the rocks had worn out wagon tires nearly asunder at the place of contact as they were looked. We were compelled to ferry the river in our wagon beds, there being no ferry, and the process was both slow and dangerous.

In three days we arrived at the last crossing of the river, and forded it, but it was so deep that we were compelled to stretch chains across the standards and place the wagon beds upon the chains; this weighted the wagons down while it allowed the water to run with less obstruction, we also doubled teams and men on each side of each team mounted on horses drove them on the tortous ford. There was an island which could be reached without great danger, but the other channel was where the difficulty was experienced. But the coolness and dexterity of our drivers succeeded in making the passage without serious accident, except the last wagon loaded with goods, which ran on a boulder and overturned, but being near the bank was rescued and the boxes quickly opened and the goods dried without great damage.

From here, until we reached the Blue Mountains we were in the hot springs country, they were met with every day and the water being at a boiling temperature and many of them emulating like a kettle; often a cat or dog that was suffering with thirst would in its haste stick its nose into the spring, withdrawing it instantly with a howl of pain and the skin entirely removed. This also was a serious matter with us as well as to the animal as it required care in doctoring them, as often they were much needed.

When we arrived at Powder river, the general topography of the country changed; valley streams and mountains were covered with timber, the grass was also better, but the exhausted stock did not seem to recripreate, they died all along the road, and had been for over 200 miles in our rear. In crossing the deserts they had laid down and 15 died with wonderful frequency, the air was so dry that there was not as much smell emitted as is generally supposed.

When we arrived at the foot of the Blue Mountain it was found necessary to remain a day or two to allow our stock to rest, but were compelled to guard our sheep, as the wolves would leave a dead ox or horse for a live sheep even in the day time. We had no difficulty in crossing the Blue mountains and the first night we camped in them, the wolves howled so that we could not hear ourselves talk, but a few well directed shots settled that wild serenade. /19

While camped at this place, my grandfather determined to burn a small tar kilm, as we were out of that necessary article. Near by was a beautiful grove of young fir. The conversation somehow turned upon the subject of a railroad being built across the plains. One of the men who had very crude ideas of the modern mode of transportation and had never seen one (in fact none of the company had) remarked: “Well when they build it, I'll come here and make a hundred thousand rails for it out of this grove, Jimeny, won't they split nice though?” Some of the company of course laughed, but he was in earnest though.

At the foot of Blue Mountains after we had crossed, we began to hear vague rumors of trouble with the Cayene Cayuse ? Indians, that they had robbed some trains etc., which was confirmed the next day by a letter written by a victim, who gave it to an Indian to show to all immigrants and to be compensated by each train giving the said Indian a shirt or two for his trouble or rather hire. A vigorous military discipline was now enforced and on the part of the men readily assented to. The first night we camped upon the Umatilla river a young Cayene Cayuse chief (?)(?) 16 came to our camp and took a great fancy to one of my Aunts, a handsome young lady of 18 years of age, and said he wanted to buy her.

Her mother who supposed it was only a joke, said he might have her in the morning for 150 horses, and he said he would give it. The next morning he and about a dozen other Indians drove at least 250 head of Cayuse ponies up near the camp and came in to claim his “white squaw” as he called her. He was told that white people did not sell their women, and it was only a joke, at this his companions commenced to laugh at him, and he became very angry and insisted upon taking her away, saying he would give the whole band. The joke now began to assume a very serious aspect, but most of the men now arrived at this very opportune moment, among them Bradshaw, who instantly knew that there was something wrong and made hasty inquiries. It was soon explained, and he decided the issue with his characteristic promptness by ordering the Indians to “puckachu” a universal word on the plains to “leave.” This they refused to do, when Bradshaw who was a good boxer told the men to stand by, knocked the young chief down, wheeling and knocked another Indian down with his left hand, and pitched into the rest of them permiscously. The young chief attempted to draw a knife, but Bradshaw sent him “ to grass “ as he termed it. The Indians who never can stand a fist fight, ignominiously fled and mounted their ponies and rode away, giving expression to some terrible language. Bradshaw immediately ordered the teams hitched up, the stock all to be driven close to the train; the women to drive the teams, while the men all mounted and armed, acted a guard in advance, on each side and rear, while he, himself went on ahead or kept in the rear as the character of the country changed favorable to an Indian attack.

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After we had traveled about two hours, we noticed all at once, about 50 Indians on the top of the hill within a few hundred yards of the road, and evidently surprised at the preparations made for their reception, as there is no doubt but they intended to charge us and take the loose stock if nothing more. The train halted, the men formed themselves between the enemy and wagons, and for a few minutes awaited the attacks, but they gave some insulting signs and rode away, and we did not see any more Indians until we camped on the banks of the Columbia river some eight days afterwards. Across the river

at this place was a large Indian village, and as soon as we camped, Indians came over being well armed, bringing wood and commenced to build a fire in the center of our camp, stating that they had come to camp and trade with us. My grandfather immediately seized a gun and ordered all the men to arm, which was promptly seconded by Bradshaw, who immediately placed himself at the head of the men, forming them in a line between the Indians and the families and immediately advanced the Indians who quickly divined the intentions of the white and commenced stringing their bows, and bringing their guns to bear upon us. For a moment or so there was imminent danger of bloodshed, when the ominous silence was broken by Bradshaw's clear ringing voice who said “puckachu”—clear out-and ordered the line forward, himself in advance. /22

The Indians remained in sullen silence until the men came within a few feet of them, then slowly began to withdraw, they were pressed to the river bank and got into their canoes and started across the river Columbia /23 18 when about 200 yards distant, an Indian arose in his canoe and shot an arrow at the men which fell near Bradshaw's feet, and it was quite an effort on his part to keep the men from firing a volley at them.

The guard was doubled that night, but we were not molested. The next morning we left a wagon and when out of camp about a quarter of a mile, the Indians ran it into the river, as they had previously crossed as we started on the days journey. Bradshaw said we made a very narrow escape as the Indians outnumbered us five to one, and that they would rob if not murder the next train that camped there. We afterwards heard that on the next night a much larger train was robbed but none were killed.

The day we left camp last spoken of, three Indians rode up to a man by the name of Fox and took off his hat, and when he tried to recover it, drew their arrows upon him and rode away as he was some little distance behind the train. The same afternoon a man by the name of J. H. Ballenger, * lagged behind with his team against the positive orders, and when about a quarter of a mile from us, the Indians suddenly surrounded his wagon and commenced to help themselves out of his wagon. The old man possessed a sabre that he

had obtained in the war of 1812, with which he began cutting the sage brush at a furious rate, as the same time talking rapidly in broken English (he being German) what he would do. The Indians laughed heartily at his antics, while Mrs. Ballenger added to the scene by lustily applying the whip to all of the savages who came within reach of her muscular arm, Bradshaw, who had been greatly annoyed at the perverse actions of Ballenger had rode back to ascertain whether he had caught up with the train; saw at first glance what was being transacted, and calling to some of the men, started at the top of his horses speed to relieve them. He

*This Ballenger, as our ancestors called them but later they were called Bellenger, was the grandfather of C. B. Bellenger who became U. S. Dist. Judge for Oregon under Cleveland's first administration. Judge C. B. Bellenger was a regent of the University of Oregon for years. /24

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suddenly dashed among the Indians, using an Indian whip, as Ballenger afterwards said “miscellaneously” on them, knocking them right and left, without regard to age or condition, before the Indians could recover from their surprise, the guard numbering some 20 men arrived, and the marauding band fled precepitately, and when away some distance fired upon the men, which was returned by two or three and an Indian shot in the leg.

The boys soon re-loaded the wagon and hurried the team up to the train, while the excited old gentleman kept up a perfect stream of talk, and demonstrating his ability in decapitating heads by slashing sage brush as he walked along. Mrs. B, kneeling in the wagon, was vociferously engaged in prayer in old camp meeting style, as Bradshaw said “in a dozen different languages, and that the Almighty would need an interpreter.” The boys always declared that Ballenger had cut down a quarter of an acre of brush; and run many a joke the remainder of the journey - employing him to clear land for them when they arrived in the Valley. This was the last Indian trouble that we had, but Ballenger always kept up with the train.

There was nothing of great interest transpired until we reached Barlow's gate, east end of the wagon road across the Cascade Mountains, passing near and south of Mt. Hood. We arrived at this place about the 1st of October, and camped for the night preparatory for the attempt next morning. We had not had any rain up to this time, but by morning it came down very heavily and continued until we emerged into the valley on the other side 16 days afterwards. The first day we passed what seemed to us an incredible number of dead stock, but it was merely the indications of the hecatombs of live property that had struggled so far 20 to miserably perish through the combined influence of scaricity of grass, chilling rains and deep mud. The road was simply a ravine—nothing more—cut through a tremedous forest, very narrow, stumps so high that wagons could scarcely pass over them, while the swamps and creeks if bridged at all, were loose poles that would slide about, letting the teams legs through or the wagons down into the mud, causing delay, injury of stock and decided peral of those who attempted to ride. The cold, insinuating rain and sleet was continuous. /26

On the second day our stock began to die rapidly, and we counted 13 yoke that died the second night. The third day we arrived at the brink of the far famed Laurel Hill, and is now historic—with all the hills or mountains that we had heretofore encountered and surmounted, this was the most appauling. At least one eighth of a mile down and remarkably steep, cut a portion of the way on the steep side of the mountains, overhanging a yawning abiss of unknown depth; the road-way which had been constructed only wide enough for a wagon to pass, with quite a stream of ice cold water flowing down the same. We looked in dismay and the cattle seemed to moan in distress. But others had descended so must we. The first thing to be done was to unhitch all the teams, except the wheel yoke and send them down first, also the women and children; then cut small fir trees about six inches in diameter, cutting the branches off leaving them about a foot long on the trunk, chain them top first to the kind of axel of each wagon, rought lock both wheels (i.e. that the knot of the chain will rest on /27 21 the ground where the wheel first comes in contact, making the greatest amount of resistance), then stock, the yoke of

oxen on the tongue were merely to guide the wagon. Then about half way down, the rode made a short turn, and the water had cut away the side of the road so much, that it was so steep as to be impossible for a wagon to make the turn without going over into the canyon below. One wagon had gone over that day as a notice on a stick in tie bank said, and the undoubted signs were there. The men passed ropes over the wagons to the lower side, the other end around trees above the road and slacked away as required by the roar and hauled taut on the front ropes as the wagon passed around the point where the road was safe. This was called “snubbing” but not intended as is generally understood to mean a treating with contempt. But we succeeded in passing the whole train over this place and down the hill by the time it was dark. This particular hill was considered to be the worst part of our journey of 2000 or more miles. When we arrived at Summit or Mt. Hood prairie, we encountered a terrific snow storm, but fortunately its fury abated, or we would have perished before morning. That night about 500 head of stock perished, (as there were several trains encamped at the same place), and it was decided to leave all the wagons but three, and return for our goods and household fixtures with pack animals, and one of my uncles to be left in charge. While the men were making preparations that day all of the women and children who were able, turned out to pick what was called Mountain Huckleberries (whirtte-berries) which grew in great abundance on bushes about 3 feet high, gallons were /28 22 thus secured, flour sacks scraped, as we were about out of that necessary article and several large puddings were baked in our different “Dutch iron ovens.” The next day our toilsome journey was resumed, and was not varied, on continued disasters accompanied all those then traveling beneath the weeping clouds of the Cascade Mountains. Our stock died every day, all along on either side and in the road lay dead, the faithfull oxen in their yokes, horses and mules in harness, while sheep lay scattered around, but not so large a percentage of the latter. The wagons wheels crushed the carcases as they unfeelingly rolled over them. On the sixteenth day we arrived in the valley at the Foster's, and insatiable land shark who settled there to acquire a competence out of other people's necessity, and misery, charging ten times the value for vegetables that he well knew they were compelled to purchase. /29

One man who in after years I became well acquainted with and who had acquired a fortune, lost all of his stock but one yoke of oxen. He packed one with such things as he could, and mounted his wife, a boy two years old and an infant child upon the other, abandoning everything else; struck out for the valley. He overtook us at Fosters, and in that condition, and we took his wife and children into one of our wagons for the rest of the journey. When it was decided to leave the train at Mt. Hood prairie, my grandfather went on to the valley to look up his two brothers who had come the year before, whom he found settled on Silver Creek near where Silverton now stands. They not knowing that he was expecting 23 to emigrate did not go out to meet us, but the next day hired Indians and 60 pack ponies started after the goods, and in due time arrived with them in good condition.

About the middle (?) of October, 1847, we arrived in Salem, thus finishing our long-journey of over 2000 miles across the American continent. Salem at that time was a missionary town, that is, had been laid out a short time previously by the missionary Board, and was the seat of protestant education, and only contained three or four houses. My grandfather opened his store, the first ever there and soon had a thriving business, taking for pay goods, the currency of the inhabitants—wheat at the value of one dollar per bushel. For groceries he went to Oregon City, the then emporium of Oregon, making most of his purchases of Dr. John McLaughlin, and when that good old man was told that he had brought his store across the plains, his astonishment knew no bounds, it seemed so incredible that for a time he was inclined to doubt the statement. (sci) /31

CONDITION OF THE COUNTRY

Oregon at this time was occupied by both Americans and the subjects of England, represented by the Hudson's Bay Company, who governed their employees and discharged servants according to their own rules and regulations. But previous to our coming a Provisional Government Had been inaugurated by the American element that resided in the Willamette Valley and the settlers of the Columbia river bottom on the east side of the river, and had been gradually improved, or rather /32 24 systematized from

year to year, with Legislature and Gov. Abernethy as Governor, and this government was maintained until the U. S. Government legalized its acts and created a Territorial government in 1849. The Americans came here to make permanent homes, they expected to build a State, by the slow action of numbers, year by year as they should come across the plains. There was no expectation of gold mines yielding fabulous wealth and its accompanying anxiety of increasing the same. But to work, make homes by the labor of their hands, live in peace, rear their families in the pursuits of industry and care of stock; —erect school houses, foster education, live under a government not contaminated with slavery and burdened with heavy taxes. A happy and pastoral people, to realize the life long dream of living without the vexatious care that surrounded them at their old homes. They were the Pilgrim fathers of the Pacific coast, but unlike those of plymouth rock in one respect, as they had not been presented by monarchical or arbitrary government, nor oppressed by religious fanaticism. They seemed then and it still does seem that they were chosen to fill one of the destinies of nations, to accomplish the grandest achievements of modern emigration of any nation. The advance guard of civilization to the western shore, to wrest a beautiful country from barbarism; the country was ripe, the time had come in the evolment of time that it should be occupied by a better people, one who would cultivate the soil and establish intercourse with the Asiatic world; the time when the occident and orient should clasp hands across the ever heaving deep was at hand. Even the heavy population of natives /33 25 that settled the Willamette Valley and adjacent districts had mostly disappeared through the instrumentality of “great sick” or some kind of plague.

The men of the “forties” (from 1840 to 1850) were no common men, they would have been men in any country; they had been winnowed out of a great nation - a chosen band. They came as a community with all the necessary characteristics to establish a well organized government; - this they put into operation as soon as they arrived; rocked the cradle of infant Provincial Government; nurtured and trained the rapidly developing youth of the Territorial Government; and welcomed him as a well developed offspring in the brotherhood of the State of the Union of the United States. So well grounded in the equity

of justice and loyalty, that Oregon responded to our country's call in the severe trial of internal war.

These men of “40” were capable of self government, they believed and practiced justice, bold without rashness, unsuspicious without verdancy, generous and hospitable to all; the “latchstring” of the door ever hanging out, the stranger welcomed as a friend, the fugal meal of boil wheat and pea coffee partaken of by all without fashionable formality. They were pioneers in fact, their wants but few and the supply at hand, health abounded and contentment rules unchecked. (sic) /35

Wheat the currency of the country; buckskin the cloth, moccasins for the feet, fur cap for the head, a blanket with a hole 26 in the middle to pass the head through and rest upon the shoulders for an overcoat; mounted on a horse with raw hide covered saddle, wooden stirrup, Spanish spurs, leggings, with raw hide larriett, you have a partial pen picture of an Oregon pioneer. Free in action, contented in mind, perfect physical health, at home at anybody's cabin, God's best specimen - man; the ruler of the world, and a dependent upon his Creator. A man to prepare the way for higher civilization, a firm believer in the government of the United States, and would maintain his rights wherever his lot may be cast.

The murder of Dr. Whitman and family, fell upon the country without warning, but the call of Governor for volunteers was responded to with amazing rapidity to the English subject, especially the Hudson's Bay Company. They councelled making peace, but the descendants of the pioneers of the Western States determined to give them a lesson of American valor and efficiency of arms in the hands of pioneers. They went, they fought, they conquered, and the Indians sued for peace, all within a few months. The work was short, sharp and complete, a source of amazement to the Indians and astonishment to the Hudson's Bay Company - who lost prestage and relinquished their hold on the country and submitted to the fate of rapidly transpiring events. /36

But this pastoral and contented state of affairs was suddenly transformed. Strange rumors came from California, that gold had been discovered in that country, it could be washed out from the gravel in the river bars, and that great fortunes could be made in a short time.

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The peaceful condition of affairs was dispelled as by magic! Averishousness developed itself with astonishing rapidity, and all desired to visit this Eldorado and dig out fortunes. Those who could and had the ready means, made immediate preparation to go, braving the storms of mountains, the danger of rapid and deep rivers, swollen by winter rains and snows, for it was late in the fall when many started. Others who from impecuniosity were unable to supply themselves, entered into contract to divide equally the gains if they were outfitted and as a rule they honestly divided the proceeds. Excitement reigned unbridled, Indian ponies, provisions, picks, shovels, etc., commanded extraordinary prices, contracts were annulled, land claims abandoned, and in fact the whole community utterly demoralized; and in two months, three-fourths of the men of the Territory were on their way to California, threading the almost unknown trail and forcing their passage over rivers against hostile Indians. Soon the yellow ore of Feather, Yuba and American rivers were in circulation in our midst, and in 1850 it was very plentiful, paid out with a lavish hand and so continued for several years, as if the supply was inexhaustable. Labor rose from one dollar in 1848 for common labors to $4.00 carpenters from $1.50 to $8 or more. /37

The agricultural interests for two or three years utterly abandoned trading, speculations, “wild cat” enterprises were the rule, fortunes were made or lost with astonishing rapidity. California in the meantime had received thousands of cosmopilitan inhabitants from all parts of the world, and nearly every nation on earth being represented

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(sic)

Crimes of every description was perpetrated, there being now law the better portion of the people took the matter vigorously in hand and Lynch law reigned for a season. The influence of crime was felt in our Territory; soon robberies and murder became alarmingly prevalent in our midst, but being better organized, the civil authorities maintained their ascendancy and executed with success what California was unable to do. /38

The discovery of gold brought a different class of people to those of the “'40””. The '40's were a bold, energetic and indomidable frontiersmen; the latter, more of a mercantile, more given to developing the resources of the country, while the former to reclaiming a country - that is—to make it possible to successfully introduce and establish civilization. The new class immediately commenced to construct steamboats for inland transportation, establishing steamship lines from New York to Astoria for the increase of mail vacilities, carrying of passengers and freight, establishing intercourse and trade with the natives on the opposite side of the Pacific ocean, and the population rapidly increased. The spelling is as the original in the Brancroft Library.

I will now revert to a subject that should have been mentioned before. When I came to Oregon, there were no mail facilities whatever. We only received newspapers by the Missionary ships once a year, and letters from friends by emigrants across the plains, and the war with Mexico had been closed some six months before we heard of it. It generally required two years to write and receive a letter and then 29 we paid 50 cents to have the letter carried to the first postoffice in Missouri by persons returning to the States. When the P. M. S. S. Co. established their line and crossed the Isthmus, we hailed it as one of the remarkable achievements of the day; we were then able to hear from our friends once every three months. The next great step was the overland mail and telegraph, and finally the completion of the continental railroad, the acme probably of human progress, and now if there should be a delay of a few days of a severe blockade, what a howl is set up, conclusively showing the perverseness of human character at a momentary delay. The first U. S. Mail that was ever received in Salem was three days coming from Oregon City

on a keel boat, and the day it left that place a gentleman came through on horseback and told the good news, consequently we were all excitement until it arrived.

Indian Wars

(This description extends to page 50 and is followed by the signature).

J. Henry Brown.